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The lower-class Negro mother has a difficult life and sees herself as a suffering matriarch who confines her life to her home, deifies her own wisdom, feels no roots in society, and who is responsible for the rearing of children without a stable husband or a friendly society. She feels that she must suppress her children's internal impulses and must shield them from the outside world. Children are seen as objects to be carefully protected when young and helpless, and controlled, shielded, and suppressed when they are older.

Efforts should be made to teach the lower-class Negro mother how to achieve her goals, which largely coincide with those of middle-class educators. To compensate for the suppressive home environment and to allow self-expression, a relatively nonauthoritarian setting in the early grades is needed. Schools should encourage verbal communications between parent and child and should stress the importance of inner control for academic and employment success. This requires that the mother and teacher listen to the child, show him alternative ways of responding to external situations and internal impulses, and let him make judgments about appropriate responses. Desirable behavior should be continually reinforced. Schools should encourage disadvantaged mothers to participate in society at large, thereby increasing contact with other classes and other viewpoints. Small, informal discussion groups composed of teachers and parents have been effective in bringing parents and educators closer together.

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The Child-Rearing Attitudes of Disadvantaged Negro Mothers and Some Educational Implications[1]

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There is a considerable amount of sociological information about the disadvantaged[2], Negro subculture, but relatively few objective data have been collected about its specific aspects of child-rearing behavior. This subculture is known to produce children who are extremely difficult to educate, and school personnel find this lack of detailed knowledge a serious handicap.

The study described in this paper was undertaken in an effort to gain sharper insight into the unique psychological forces operating within these families. It is hoped that the findings will be helpful to the many educators and social workers struggling to intervene in the well known cycle of unemployment — deprivation — school failure — school drop-out — unemployment.

PROCEDURE

A parental attitude questionnaire was administered in the fall of 1962 to 44 culturally deprived, Negro mothers and 50 middle-class, Caucasian mothers of 3-, 4-, or 5-year-old children living in a Midwestern city. The culturally deprived sample was obtained in connection with a nursery school for culturally disadvantaged children, and the middle-class sample was obtained from mothers of children attending kindergarten in a middle-class neighborhood.

The socioeconomic status of the mothers was determined by a formula which took into account the parents' education and occupation and the degree of crowding in the home. As Table 1 shows, a low score obtained by the use of this formula indicates low socioeconomic status, with its accompanying cultural deprivation.

The instrument used to assess attitudes was the Parental Attitude Research Instrument (PARI), which consists of 115 statements. The respondent is asked to respond in one of four possible ways to each statement: "Disagree strongly," "Disagree mildly," "Agree mildly," and "Agree strongly." Since this instrument is usually scored by totaling the scores on five items comprising a subscale, the usual scoring procedure yields 23 subscale scores. It was observed, however, that the five statements making up a subscale often tapped different areas of child rearing, and the decision was made

[1]This study was conducted by the public school system in Ypsilanti, Michigan, a city of 23,200 approximately 30 miles west of Detroit. It was supported in part by a grant from the Office of Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The authors wish to express appreciation to David P. Weikart, Director of the Perry Preschool Project and the staff of the project who assisted in data collection.

[2]The terms "disadvantaged", "deprived", and "lower class" are used interchangeably in this paper and refer to the 18 per cent of our population characterized by severe poverty, unstable employment, and the lowest-paid service and unskilled work.

TABLE I

SOCIOECONOMIC DATA FOR LOWER-CLASS, NEGRO AND MIDDLE-CLASS, CAUCASIAN SAMPLES

Socioeconomic data	Lower-class Negro (N = 44)	Middle-class Caucasian (N = 50)
Socioeconomic status score (average)	8.2	16.4
Mother's education (average grade)	9.2	12.7
Father's education (average grade)	8.3	13.8
Mother's occupation* (average level)	1.0	3.1
Father's occupation* (average level)	1.1	3.4
Average number of children in the family	4.5	3.2
Average age of mother	30	31
Mothers educated in the South	48%	19%
Father in the home	48%	100%
Family on welfare	58%	0%
Dictionary in the home	24%	90%

*Occupational scale: 1 = unskilled labor
2 = Semiskilled labor
3 = skilled labor
4 = Professional or managerial

to analyze the responses to each item in order to study the views of middle-class and disadvantaged mothers concerning specific issues. It soon became apparent that individual items within a subscale often differed greatly in their sensitivity to class differences.

The item analysis was performed in terms of the percentage of mothers in each sample who agreed with each statement. The four responses to each statement were collapsed into the two categories of "Agree" and "Disagree."

The ratio of the per cent of endorsement by the disadvantaged mothers over the per cent of endorsement by the middle-class mothers was then computed for each item to indicate the degree of similarity between the two samples. For example, if 48 per cent of the former group and 12 per cent of the latter group endorsed an item, the ratio was 4.0. Identical per cent of endorsement yielded a ratio of 1.0.

All 115 items were ranked according to similarity of response, with the item eliciting the most similar response (a ratio of 1.0) heading the list and the item eliciting the most dissimilar response (a ratio of 23.5) appearing last.[8] The top 24 items and the bottom 25 items of

[8] The ratios of the top 24 items ranged from 1.0 to 0.91 and 1.10 in both directions away from the decimal point. The ratios of the bottom 25 items ranged from 3.2 to 23.5.

the rank order were then selected to study the similarities and differences between the two groups, and the remaining 66 items were discarded. (Twenty-four rather than 25 items were kept from the top of the list because several items tied for the rank of 25.)

A year after the first administration of the PARI, the same instrument was administered to a new group of 20 similarly selected, disadvantaged, Negro mothers (in the fall of 1963), and the entire procedure was replicated, i.e., the responses of these 20 mothers were item-analyzed and ranked, and the top 24 items and the bottom 25 items were identified. Sixteen of the original 24 items at the top of the rank order and 24 of the original 25 items at the bottom held up in this replication. (The loss of so many items from the original 24 items eliciting the most similar responses may be related to the small differences which are found at this end of the rank ordering.) The following discussion is based on the 16 items from the top and the 24 items from the bottom of the rank order which held up in the replication study.

The 40 items which held up in the replication study were grouped around two theoretically meaningful concepts for the purpose of interpretation. The first group of items concerns the mothers' beliefs and feelings toward specific aspects of child rearing, and the second group is related to the context within which child rearing takes place — the mothers' feelings toward themselves, the nuclear family, and society in general.

The administration of the PARI to disadvantaged, Negro mothers and the interpretation of their replies require some clarification. The PARI is a paper-and-pencil test designed for group administration, but it was administered individually and orally to the disadvantaged mothers because their literacy was questionable. It was administered individually as a paper-and-pencil test to the middle-class mothers after a pilot study revealed no significant difference between the two techniques of administration with this group.

The problem of an acquiescence response set of the lower-class respondents was discussed in another paper by the senior author (Radin and Glasser, 1964). The conclusion reached in that paper was that although there is evidence for the presence of a response set, the replies of the disadvantaged mothers varied sufficiently from item to item to indicate that something other than a response set was operating. Whether this "something" was a genuine attitude or an effort to give the socially desirable response has not been determined, but the responses are of significance in any event. It is as important to understand the disadvantaged population's concept of the socially desirable response as it is to learn their "true" attitudes because, as Bronfenbrenner (1958) says, changes in knowledge of the experts' opinions precede changes in attitude toward child rearing.

In the following discussion, no effort is made to differentiate between "true" attitudes and socially desirable responses. Similarly, no effort is made to validate the mothers' verbal responses against their actual behavior. These procedures would go beyond the scope of this study.

Results

Beliefs and Feelings toward Various Aspects of Child Rearing

The statements pertaining to various aspects of child rearing to which middle- and lower-class mothers responded similarly (ratios of .91 to 1.09) were analyzed.[4] The views held in common may be summarized as follows:

1. Children need discipline and firm rules. (Items 77 and 54)
2. Children have certain rights as members of the family. They should have a voice in making family decisions and have the right to protest when they feel that family rules are unreasonable. In fact, parents must *earn* the respect of children, and the sharing of interests and free communication between parents and children are highly desirable. (Items 70, 24, 37, 47, 93, 21, 67, 113, and 44)
3. Babies are helpless and need protection. (Item 6)

A typical item eliciting similar responses was "Most children should have more discipline," which was endorsed by 93 per cent of the lower-class mothers and 88 per cent of the middle-class mothers.

The statements to which the two groups of mothers responded differently (ratios of 3.7 to 17.5)[5] were also analyzed, and the following attitudes were found to be expressed by disadvantaged, Negro mothers considerably more frequently than by middle-class mothers:

1. Some children are just so bad that they must be taught to fear adults for their own good. (Item 4)
2. Children must not be encouraged to talk about their problems because the more they are allowed to complain, the more they will complain and pester mothers. In fact, they even "make up a lot of stories to keep you interested" (Items 62, 108, and 16), but it is a mother's duty to make sure that she knows her child's innermost thoughts. (Item 112)
3. Children should be protected from any disappointment, difficult situations, and "life's little difficulties." (Items 25, 71, 94, and 2)
4. Sex is an enormous problem for children, and any interest in sex, either verbal or behavioral, must be suppressed. (Items 87, 64, and 110) Similarly, aggression in the form of boxing, wrestling, and hitting another child must all be suppressed. (Items 58 and 81)
5. It is desirable to get children out of the helpless stage of infancy as early as possible (Items 22 and 45)

A typical item displaying marked socio-economic-class difference was "A good mother should shelter her child from life's little difficulties." This item was endorsed by 64 per cent of the lower-class mothers and 12 per cent of the middle-class mothers.

Beliefs and Feelings toward Themselves, the Nuclear Family, and Society

[4] PARI items 77(93, 88), 54(65, 68), 70 (75, 74), 24(95, 90), 37(91, 94), 47(90, 96), 93(84, 84), 21(100, 98), 67(93, 94), 113(93, 96), 44(82, 90), and 6(100, 92). The first number in parentheses after each item indicates per cent of endorsement by the lower class, and the second number indicates per cent of endorsement by the middle class.

[5] PARI items 4 (35, 2), 62 (79, 16), 108 (62, 8), 16 (41, 6), 112 (66, 18), 25 (73, 14), 71 (68, 12), 94 (66, 8), 2 (64, 12), 87 (84, 20), 64 (57, 4), 110 (47, 2), 58 (50, 9), 81 (48, 12), 22 (69, 16), and 45 (63, 12). Refer to footnote 4 above for explanation of numbers in parentheses.

There were four items in this category to which the two groups of mothers responded similarly (ratios of .94 to 1.07).[6] It was found from these four items that mothers of both classes agree that conflicts between a wife and a husband are to be expected (Items 53 and 99), and that motherhood is a nerve-wracking job (Items 9 and 55).

Eight items in this category were found to show stark class difference (ratios of 3.2 to 10.3).[7] An examination of their content indicated that although both groups of mothers expect to experience conflicts within the home, only the disadvantaged women see themselves as suffering and having little fun in life (Items 74 and 97). This feeling of suffering is reinforced by a feeling of isolation from the rest of society and the belief that mothers should not find consolation outside the home (Items 95 and 3). A feeling of alienation from the rest of the world is reflected in Items 56 and 57, which imply that the outside world will attempt to undermine parental authority and is to be viewed with suspicion. For example, "Children should never learn things outside the home which make them doubt their parents' ideas" was endorsed by 75 per cent of the lower-class mothers and 14 per cent of the middle-class mothers.

To make life even more difficult, the disadvantaged, Negro mothers believe that it is the mother, not the father, who is ultimately responsible for the welfare of the family (Item 88). Thus, although both groups of women expect to have conflicts with their husbands, the middle-class mother expects her spouse to share the responsibility for the welfare of the family, whereas the lower-class, Negro mother operates as a matriarch carrying the burden of the responsibility alone. Item 10 indicates a belief by lower-class mothers that Mamma not only rules the home but is also always right.

The picture thus emerges of a suffering matriarch who confines her life to her home, deifies her own wisdom, feels no roots in society, and eyes the outside world with great suspicion.

Discussion

The disadvantaged, Negro mothers' feelings toward child rearing shed light on why children from this socioeconomic group have such difficulty participating in our middle-class schools and ultimately in middle-class society. The lower-class, Negro mother believes that infancy is a stage of helplessness and is eager to get the baby to be out of diapers and walking. While she thus wants her child to be physically independent, she is very protective, intrusive, and controlling, and has little respect for the child as an individual. Compared to the middle-class mother who believes in exposing children to challenging situations and supporting them in coping with challenges, the lower-class mother believes in protecting her children from the "little difficulties" of the world, which she views with profound suspicion. She is thus overprotective in shielding children from problems, but cannot help them learn to cope with problems because of her impatience with listening to them. Her own

[6] PARI items 53 (95, 90), 99 (93, 88), 9 (77, 72), and 55 (77, 82). Refer to footnote 4 above for explanation of numbers in parentheses.

[7] PARI items 74 (82, 8), 97 (70, 16), 95 (77, 22), 3 (56, 6), 56 (75, 14), 57 (73, 22), 88 (71, 22), and 10 (63, 16). Refer to footnote 4 above for explanation of numbers in parentheses.

life is too full of burdens and too devoid of security.

The lower-class Negro is usually characterized by great sexual freedom (promiscuity and illegitimacy) and aggressiveness (violence and fighting). It is often assumed that this anti-social behavior is accepted in this sub-culture. The analysis of the PARI indicates that this assumption is incorrect at least insofar as children's behavior is concerned. Lower-class, Negro mothers are very disturbed by any evidence of sexuality and aggressiveness in their children and want to suppress it whenever it appears. This suppressive attitude may be a reaction to the excesses these mothers see about them. The only way the anxious mothers know of preventing their children from becoming promiscuous and aggressive adults is to squelch the internal drive before it develops.

The overprotection which was mentioned earlier represents another type of preventive endeavor. These mothers are threatened and fearful of the rough external world which they literally observe. The only technique they can think of to save their children from its dangers is to keep them away from difficulties completely. This emphasis on overprotection in relation to external dangers and suppression in relation to internal impulses indicates the lower-class mothers' inability to conceive of the child as having a potential for developing coping skills and internal control.

Of particular interest to educators are views on verbal communication between mother and child. While lower-class mothers acknowledge that respect for the child is important, and that the sharing of experiences and a feeling of closeness are desirable, they are definitely not interested in listening to children's problems. Yet, they agree with the statement, "It is a mother's duty to make sure she knows her child's innermost thoughts (Item 112)." These attitudes of not being interested in listening to children's problems and yet wanting to know their innermost thoughts indicate a lack of genuine respect for the child as an individual. Respect for children is difficult to maintain when some children are seen as basically bad, and the mother is seen as being omniscient. The middle-class mother, in contrast, believes in respecting the privacy of children's thoughts, but is willing to discuss the problems that are brought up by children.

The prevalence of physical aggression among the lower class can be understood as the result of child-rearing practices which suppress physical aggression and yet do not show how to resolve conflicts by verbal means. When children do not know how to resolve conflicts by discussion through mutual respect, they have to resort to physical aggression to make their wishes known and satisfy them.

Bernstein (1961) has pointed out the relationship between the power structure of the family and the cognitive development of children. If the family is authoritarian, as is the Negro matriarchy, there is little incentive for the child to develop verbal skills because there is no discussion of issues nor opportunity to exert influence. In a democratic family, on the other hand, it pays to learn how to communicate with others. This is the best environment for language development, for language becomes involved and elaborate when the child is given an incentive not only to please others but also to convince them that he has a legit-

imate request. It is well known that reading readiness depends on language development.

Socialization in the lower class is thus based mainly on the convenience and misconceptions of a suffering matriarch. The very techniques the lower-class mother chooses with good intention (suppression and avoidance) are the least effective in helping children to develop the trait crucial to upward mobility—internal control, or ego strength. It is truly pathetic that the lower-class mother feels in vain that "Mothers sacrifice almost all their own fun for their children (Item 97)."

Some Implications for Educators

School personnel see the results of the lower-class, Negro mothers' child-rearing techniques. The lack of inner control in these children produces disruptive behavior as soon as external control (the teacher) disappears. Immediate gratification of desires is more typical than delay of gratification, which is so essential for academic success. The lack of ability to verbalize and think conceptually can be related to the lack of early parental efforts to communicate with children.

Underneath this discouraging surface, however, some encouraging attitudes were found. Disadvantaged, Negro mothers do share the values of middle-class society pertaining to sexuality and aggression (and to education as well, according to another study [Radin and Glasser, 1963]). Lower-class mothers agree in general terms that an equalitarian, consulting relationship with youngsters is desirable and that children should be allowed to express their thoughts. What is not understood is the essential relationship between "moral" behavior and genuine communication between mother and child. In broader terms, the means needed to arrive at the desired goals are not comprehended. This is where educational institutions can play an important role. Efforts should be made to teach the lower-class, Negro mother how to achieve her goals, which largely coincide with those of middle-class educators.

The following four ideas appear promising in promoting cooperative efforts of schools and parents:

1. Since disadvantaged children appear to be reared in a suppressive environment and are known to be poorly developed in language skills, it would seem wise for schools to compensate for this suppressive home environment by providing a relatively non-authoritarian setting in the early grades for disadvantaged children to exercise self-expression.

2. Schools should encourage verbal communication between parent and child so that children can learn at an early age to think through and verbalize the causes and consequences of their behavior and to express their feelings and thoughts. This requires much time and patience on the part of parents, since it often involves listening to trivial stories and complaints.

3. Schools should stress the importance of inner control for academic and employment success. This requires the mother as well as the teacher to (a) listen to the child to determine how he sees the problem, (b) show him alternative ways of responding to the external situation as well as the internal impulses, (c) let him make judgments about the appropriate responses to different situations, taking into account not only the immediate impact but also the long-range

consequences, and (d) continually reinforce the desirable behavior through giving attention, praise, and affection. Prohibiting undesirable behavior alone is not sufficient.

4. Schools should encourage disadvantaged mothers to participate in society at large so that they will come more intimately in contact with other classes and other viewpoints. Such participation would also reduce the feeling of alienation and the ensuing need for a defensive barrier of self-deification. Involving them in school affairs would be a good starting point, since these mothers do want a better life for their children. This will not be easy, since it conflicts with their sense of isolation and distrust of others, as well as the belief that a mother's place is in the home.

One technique found to be highly effective[5] in bringing parents and educators closer together is the small, informal discussion group composed of a teacher and mothers of the children in her class. This approach should work at any grade level, provided the essential ingredients are present—a willingness on the part of the educator to go 90 per cent of the way or further to get the parent to the meeting, a basic respect for the mother as a human being in spite of her unfamiliarity with the mores of school personnel, a warm and relaxed atmosphere where the type of clothing worn is unimportant, and, above all, a setting in which all members of the group relate to one another on an equal level and not in the hierarchy of a lecturer instructing students.

[5]Mothers and fathers of children in the Ypsilanti Preschool Project have been meeting in separate, small, discussion groups since September, 1962, when the nursery school began operation.

Summary

The lower-class, Negro mother has a difficult life and sees herself as responsible for the rearing of her children, with the assistance of neither a stable husband nor a friendly society. She feels that she must suppress children's internal impulses and that she must shield them from the threatening outside world. She cannot conceive of children's potential for developing inner control. Children are seen as objects to be carefully protected when young and helpless and then controlled, shielded, and suppressed as they grow older.

In contrast, the middle-class mother believes that children need definite limits but considers it important within these limits that youngsters express their thoughts and make their own decisions. It is this kind of middle-class environment that produces children who have a high probability of success in school and in the employment world. There is much that educational institutions can do to help lower-class, Negro mothers alter some of their self-defeating child-rearing techniques.

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